A WORKER cuts wooden logs into pieces at a stall on Charsadda Road in Peshawar on Sunday. — Photo by Shahbaz Butt

KP business community raises alarm over prolonged border closure

Pakistan-Afghanistan bilateral trade has declined by 53pc

Bureau Report

PESHAWAR: The prolonged closure of trade routes between Pakistan and Afghanistan for over three months inflicted massive economic losses running into billions of rupees at both national and regional levels, business leaders said here on Sunday.

They said that the suspension of cross-border trade severely affected exports, bilateral commerce, transportation businesses and government revenue, dealing a major blow to the country's economy in general and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's in particular, where the business community largely depended on trade with Afghanistan.

The views were expressed by senior vice-president of Pakistan-Afghanistan Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry Ziaul Haq Sarhadi and Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry representative Manzoor Ellahi in a joint press statement issued here.

They said that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had been disproportionately impacted due to its geographical proximity to Afghanistan, strong ethnic and commercial ties and heavy reliance on cross-border trade. More than 90 per cent of Pakistan's exports to Afghanistan passed through Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Customs stations, primarily via the Torkham border crossing, they added.

According to the businessmen, the province has suffered an estimated export losses of Rs2.5 billion due to halted shipments of goods including cement, textiles, pharmaceuticals, construction materials and agricultural produce. In addition, KP has lost nearly Rs2.5bn in revenue during the first five months of the current fiscal year owing to reduced trade activity and lower customs collections.

They said exporters in the province were incurring losses exceeding $4 million daily, with stranded goods worth billions of rupees. Perishable goods spoiled, while medicines and raw materials expired, resulting in irreparable financial losses.

They added that Afghan transit trade to Central Asia, which previously involved 4,000 to 5,000 consignments annually, had declined sharply, adversely affecting the logistics and transport sectors as well as related revenues in the province.

Highlighting broader economic consequences, the businessmen warned that prolonged border closure was leading to industrial shutdowns and job losses. They claimed that up to 90pc of KP's industrial sector depended on Afghan markets for exports and imports and continued disruption could result in widespread factory closures, large-scale unemployment and heightened regional insecurity amid growing economic distress.

Referring to the transport and labour sectors, they said thousands of truck drivers, labourers and daily wage workers in border areas had lost their livelihoods, while commercial activity in markets across Peshawar and other cities had slowed significantly. Farmers and traders had also suffered heavy losses due to spoilage of fruits, vegetables and other perishable goods.

They cautioned that the long-term consequences could be more severe, as Afghanistan was increasingly diverting its trade to Iran and Central Asian states, potentially resulting in the permanent loss of markets for KP-based businesses.

Citing a recent report, they said Pakistan-Afghanistan bilateral trade had declined by 53pc year-on-year, falling to $594 million during the first half of the ongoing fiscal year (2025-26) from $1.26bn in the corresponding period of the previous fiscal year, largely due to the closure of border crossings.

Saidu hospital to get status of teaching institution

By Ashfaq Yusufzai

PESHAWAR: The health department has decided to notify Saidu wing of Saidu Group of Teaching Hospital Swat as medical teaching institution and its central wing as district headquarters hospital.

Sources in health department told *Dawn* that provincial cabinet approved granting the status of medical teaching institution (MTI) to Khyber Institute of Child Health (KICH) Peshawar and Saidu wing of Saidu Group of Teaching Hospital (SGTH) Swat.

"The government has already announced Board of Governors (BoGs) for KICH as per MTI Act, 2015, while SGTH will get the same status," they said.

A few months ago when government started converting SGTH to MTI, the latter had suggested that its central wing should be declared as district headquarters hospital (DHQ) while Saidu wing could be made MTI.

Presently, SGTH consists of central and Saidu wings. Both the wings of the hospital are located one kilometre apart. The central wing of the hospital, which is actually a former district headquarters hospital, has 233 beds and its Saidu wing has 656 beds.

Now, a decision has been taken according to which the central wing of the hospital will be declared district headquarters hospital because the residents of the area think that after getting the status of a medical teaching institution, SGTH would slip out of the control of health department and will be managed by BoG.

In order to satisfy the residents of the area, it has been decided that there will be a DHQ as well that will continue to operate under the health department, according to sources.

As per the provincial law, each district is required to have a DHQ. The administration of SGTH had suggested establishment of district headquarters hospital to avoid protests by locals if both wings of the hospital were converted into MTI, sources said.

The district headquarters hospital in Swat was made part of Saidu Hospital and named as SGTH to pave way for recognition of Saidu Medical College (SMC) in 1998. It was recognised by Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PMDC), the regulator of medical education in the country, because of merger of Saidu hospital and district headquarters hospital.

Currently, Swat Medical College and its affiliated SGTH are operating under health department. Swat Medical College has been affiliated with Khyber Medical University (KMU), Peshawar.

The provincial government has so far brought 11 institutions under Medical Teaching Institutions Reforms Act (MTIRA), passed in 2015. Saidu hospital will be 12th medical teaching institution in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa that will be governed through BoG.

However, civil society, political parties and representatives of healthcare professionals had launched protest against the government's plan of making the hospital an MTI.

The architects of MTIRA had held meetings with the protesting people wherein it was agreed that Saidu wing of the hospital would be made MTI while its central part would be declared as DHQ.

Sources said that local politicians also feared that they would lose influence over Swat Medical College and Saidu College of Dentistry (SCD) and its affiliated hospital once they came under the new law. Politicians can interfere in the affairs of government-run hospitals and colleges but cannot do the same in MTI-covered institutions as all the decisions in such hospitals are taken by the respective BoG.

In future, the employees of SMC, SCD and Saidu wing of the hospital, which are being made MTI, will also face issues because they are civil servants. "MTIs will recruit its own employees and civil servants will be repatriated to health department," sources said.

They said that a lot of issues were likely to crop up, subsequently. Presently, all the employees of the hospital are civil servants, who will be repatriated and will be replaced with MTI's staffers.

Ex-MPA flays exclusion of Chitral from Sehat Card scheme

By Our Correspondent

CHITRAL: A former MPA has expressed grave concern over the continued exclusion of both the Upper and Lower Chitral districts from the government's flagship Sehat Sahulat Programme.

Talking to mediapersons here on Sunday, Syed Sardar Hussain Shah criticised the provincial government for 'punishing' the people of the backward area where healthcare facilities were almost non-existent, which can be gauged from the fact that out of 100 posts of doctors, 88 were vacant in hospitals.

He said that the primary hurdle cited for the programme's absence was a set of stringent empanelment criteria, which required a specific number of specialist doctors and advanced diagnostic equipment that the government had failed to provide in these remote regions.

He said that despite being a separate administrative district and remotest area of the country, none of healthcare facilities in Upper Chitral, including the Tehsil Headquarters Hospital, Booni, currently offered treatment under the Sehat Sahulat Card.

Mr Shah argued that since the appointment of specialists was the sole responsibility of the government, it was unjust to deprive citizens of health insurance due to administrative shortcomings.

"The situation in Lower Chitral is similarly restrictive while the Sehat Sahulat facility is operational only at the District Headquarters Hospital in Chitral city catering more than half-a-million population of both the districts while its major healthcare facility, THQ Hospital Drosh, remained without it," he said.

"It is highly deplorable that the promise of universal health coverage remains unfulfilled in Upper and Lower Chitral due to the lack of local empanelled facilities although Sehat Sahulat Programme, which provides up to Rs1 million in annual health coverage per family in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, remains fully operational in other districts of the province," he continued.

The former MPA warned of protests if the government did not immediately relax empanelment criteria for mountainous regions or urgently deploy the necessary specialists to Booni and Drosh hospitals to empanel them for the facility.

When contacted, Upper Chitral district health officer Dr Farman Wali Khan admitted the prevalence of the issue and said that through a series of correspondence, the higher authorities had been apprised but the absence of specialist doctors in the Booni hospital remained the major obstacle.

Five killed in Khyber, Peshawar road accidents

Dawn Report

KHYBER/PESHAWAR: Five people were killed and 16 others injured in separate road accidents in Khyber and Peshawar, the police and Rescue 1122 officials said on Sunday.

Rescue 1122 officials said four youth, two brothers among them, were killed and one was critically injured in a road accident in Jamrud on Saturday night.

They said five friends were travelling in a car around midnight when it collided with a dumper truck due to over-speeding, killing Zarar, Suhail, Daud and Mansoor on the spot, while Nauman received critical injuries and was later admitted to the intensive care unit of Hayatabad Medical Complex in Peshawar.

The deceased and the injured were returning to their homes after attending a feast they had arranged for another friend who had married a few days ago. The newlywed young man was travelling in another car behind the ill-fated vehicle which met the fatal accident.

Meanwhile, an infant lost his life due to extreme cold while his family was on their way from Tirah Valley to Bara, sources said.

They said that the family got stranded on the road due to rush at the registration point in the Paindi Cheena area, thus forcing them to spend the night on the road in extreme cold.

In Peshawar, one person died and 15 others, including children, sustained injuries following a collision between two passenger vehicles in Badhber area on Sunday, rescue officials said.

They said Rescue 1122 received a call and it dispatched six teams to the area, including ambulances and disaster response teams, recovering 15 injured and a body.

Rescue 1122 spokesperson Bilal Faizi said the body and injured were shifted to Naseerullah Babar Hospital and Lady Reading Hospital.

Meanwhile, Kohat Road in Peshawar remained blocked for hours after a hay-loaded truck overturned right in the middle of the artery within the jurisdiction of Badhber police station in the wee hours of Sunday.

Police said that the road was cleared by Sunday evening.

RESCUERS separate two vehicles from each other after a collision on Kohat Road, near Badhber, in Peshawar on Sunday. — White Star

Assistant professor shot dead in Dera

By Our Correspondent

DERA ISMAIL KHAN: Unidentified motorcyclists shot dead an assistant professor of Government Degree College, Darazinda, when he was going in a rickshaw after attending a case hearing at a local court here on Saturday.

A murder case has been registered at the Paharpur police station on the complaint of Mohammad Aamir Baloch, a resident of Kot Isa Khan area.

The complainant stated that he was on duty at a medical centre, when he received information that his uncle, Sheeran Baloch, had been attacked.

He said that when he reached Civil Hospital Paharpur, his uncle had already succumbed to his injuries.

The police said the deceased had attended a hearing at the court of the additional district and sessions judge, Paharpur, and was traveling towards Rangpur in a rickshaw when the assailants attacked him.

The complainant stated that there was an ongoing enmity related to previous murder cases with the suspects, identified as Aziz, a resident of Gulshan Colony, along with Khurram Nadeem Qureshi, and Fahad Qureshi, residents of Darabin Kalan.

Police registered a case and initiated further investigations.

Missing tourists located, evacuated in Nathiagali

By Our Correspondent

ABBOTTABAD: In a coordinated rescue effort, Abbottabad police successfully located and evacuated three tourists, who went missing amid severe weather conditions in Nathiagali.

The operation was conducted under the directives of DIG Hazara Nasir Mahmood Satti and the supervision of Abbottabad district police officer Haroon Rasheed Khan.

According to sources, the three individuals, Zahid, Khanzada Shehan and Umar, all residents of Multan, lost their way on January 9 while visiting Miranjani Top. Heavy snowfall, rugged terrain, and hazardous pathways left them stranded.

Upon receiving the report, Abbottabad police immediately launched a search operation.

After two days of sustained efforts, all three tourists were safely located in phases and moved to a secure location.

Domel jirga rejects terrorists' demand to dismantle peace body

BANNU: A jirga was held in Domel area here on Sunday under the auspices of Hatikhel peace committee to review the prevailing law and order situation in the area.

Prominent elders, including Malik Tawani, Malik Ibrahim, Malik Aqal Jan, Malik Noor Daraz, Syed Alam, Usman, and others attended the jirga.

The elders unanimously announced that the Hatikhel peace committee would remain intact, and no compromise would be made on peace and stability in the area.

The elders also dispelled misunderstandings that had recently emerged regarding the Ahmadzai tribe.

The participants informed the jirga that a few days ago, two people of the Ahmadzai tribe were detained by terrorists and later released.

Following their release, an audio message was circulated on social media by militants, claiming that the detainees had been freed on the condition that the Ahmadzai tribe would dismantle the peace committee and allow militants to use Ahmadzai land.

However, the elders present at the jirga categorically rejected the demand, stating that no such condition was accepted.

The jirga declared that the peace committee would continue its activities without interruption.

Regional police officer Sajjad Khan stated that full and effective security would be provided to the Hatikhel jirga and the peace committee. — Correspondent

Twelve held in raid on Swabi dance party

SWABI: In a midnight raid on a dance party in Razaar tehsil, the police arrested 12 people, including two transgender persons, women dancers, along with spectators, officials said on Sunday.

However, the transgender persons were later released while an FIR was registered against the others.

DSP Razaar tehsil circle Hassan Khan said that SHO Kalu Khan police station Abdul Wali Khan along with a police contingent raided a dance party at a hujra in Karnal Sher Khan Kalay following complaints by the local residents.

He said when the police party arrived at the dance party, loud music was being played and money was being showered on the dancers.

A 12-bore repeater was also recovered from the spot, he said. Cases have been registered against the arrested persons. — Correspondent